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## The Benefits of Affordable/Free Education Op Ed

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It has been well established that people with more education live longer, healthier lives. People with more education tend to take better care of themselves, are more likely to exercise, go to the doctor, and are less likely to resort to harmful behaviors such as smoking and drinking. They also tend to have fewer functional limitations, such as ones resulting from physical disabilities and chronic diseases. Healthier people endure less struggles, experience more comfort, social, and positive lives. More educated people report having higher levels of both eudaimonic and hedonic subject well being.

Earning a college degree allows people to access more fulfilling jobs, with better working conditions. It also provides them with higher incomes, which both supports their better health and allows them to afford living in safer neighborhoods; leading them to having lower mortality rates. Conversely, people with less education are more likely to report feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, being prone to feeling more tired, finding everyday activities to be more effortful, and having less positivity in their lives. Even after controlling the income and health factors, people with a college education are still found to have a higher subjective well being.

Higher education is also linked with other health benefits, such as having an increased sense of control and learned effectiveness. Educated people are better equipped at making self realizations, figuring out what their interests are, what their strengths and weaknesses are, where limitations may lie, who they are, and how to go about utilizing themselves in pursuing what is in their best interest. It is thus no surprise that people with more education are found to have more ambition, find more satisfaction in their jobs, living situations, communities, families, and have more autonomy.

People with college degrees also report having more meaningful and satisfying interpersonal relationships, report having happier marriages, and are less likely to get divorced. These findings make sense considering the reduction in income related stress factors and the comfort that education related income brings. People with higher education are also much less likely to rely on social assistance, and bring more to the infrastructure through paying higher taxes. Educated people also report having better relationships with their children; they are less likely to be abusive, are more likely to be accepting and supportive, and are more likely to provide their children with over all better parenting. The parenting children get is a crucial determinant on how they will develop and apply themselves later on in life. This is a very significant factor in regards to the well-being of our society, as our children are our future. More educated people also tend to be more engaged in their communities, become more informed voters, and are less likely to engage in criminal activities. Having a more educated population could translate into better decisions being made throughout our social structures, which in turn could lead us to progressing towards a more functional, healthier, and happier society.

The costs associated with obtaining a higher education have been steadily rising. Even after taking inflation into account, they have doubled over the last 20 years. Our country's student loan debt has been skyrocketing, having reached \$1.5 trillion dollars in 2017. The increasing cost of higher education, and the fear of the debts associated with it, is causing students to second guess pursuing any, putting them at a disadvantage in regards to their line of employment. Studies from 2016 found that young Americans who had obtained a bachelor's degree earned 57% more than these with high school diplomas. Over their life spans, it is

estimated that individuals with an associate's degree will earn \$360,000, and people with a bachelor's degree will earn \$1 million more than these with high school diplomas.

Affordable higher education would provide our society with a better educated workforce, which in turn could help our economy grow. The United States of America is by far the richest country in the world; we could easily fund higher education, as we do for grades 1-12, if so we wanted to. There are plenty of ways we could re-appropriate funds towards our higher education system. Our governing body just does not have affordable higher education as a current priority. Luckily, proponents of free/affordable higher education programs such as Ocasio-Cortez, Warren, Sanders, and more, are gaining ground. Sanders for example, proposes funding his 'College for All Act' by us ceasing to give tax breaks to our billionaires, and have them pay their fair share of taxes, or simply by redirect some of the \$600+ billion annual budget we spend on our military. Although, the benefits of higher education are undeniable, the increasing costs associated with high education makes it inaccessible for most of us. This is an issue we need to address. We need to implement programs that would establish higher education as a basic human right.